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## JUAN RODRIGUEZ DE FONSECA: FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE INDIES (1493-1523)

Down on the Pacific coast of Central America, the republics of Nicaragua, Salvador and Honduras meet in a wide bay, the Bahía de Fonseca, so named on the twenty-sixth of January, 1522, by its discoverer, Gil González Dávila; and this is America's only memorial to the man who for thirty years—from 1493 to 1523—guided her destinies. Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, Count of Pernia, was Bishop successively of Badajoz, Córdoba, Palencia and Burgos, Archbishop of Rosano, and first President of the Council of the Indies. America has never given a monument to her "first President," and with but few exceptions, every historical reference to Fonseca during the past 400 years has been made the occasion of an attack upon his character. Irving<sup>1</sup> has given us a

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<sup>1</sup> *Columbus*, 5 vols., New York, 1892, Appendix 34. The traditional view of Fonseca is given by LAS CASAS, *Historia de las Indias*, 5 vols., Madrid, 1875; HERRERA, *Historia General*, Madrid, 1601; BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO, *Conquista de Nueva España*, Madrid, 1853; and others. QUINTANA (*Historia de Hombres Célebres*, Madrid, 1852) and PRESCOTT (*Conquest of Mexico*, 2 vols., New York, 1886) follow these sources, as do most modern writers, with the notable exception of THACHER (*Columbus*, New York, 1904); and FERNÁNDEZ DURO (*Amigos y Enemigos de Colón*, Madrid, 1892). A favorable view of Fonseca is presented by SIGÜENZA in his *Historia de la Orden de San Jerónimo*, Madrid, 1909; SOLÍS, *Conquista de Méjico*, Madrid, 1853, and BERNÁLDEZ, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, Madrid, 1878. Irving is mistaken in crediting to Bernáldez a veiled enmity to Fonseca. Additional biographical material is contained in GÓMARA, *Historia de las Indias* and *Conquista de Méjico*, Madrid, 1852; and GALÍNDEZ CARVAJAL, *Memorial y Registro Breve de los Reyes Católicos*, Madrid, 1878. For documents, the important printed collections are: *Colección de Documentos Inéditos de Indias*; *Boletín de la Real Academia de Historia*; NAVARRETE, *Colección de Viajes y Descubrimientos*, 5 vols, Madrid, 1858; *Cartas de Hernán Cortés*, Madrid, 1858 (translated by FOLSOM, *Despatches of Cortés*, New York, 1843, and MACNUTT, *Letters of Cortes*, New York, 1908), and DUQUESA DE BERWICK Y ALBA, *Autógrafos de Colón y Papeles de América*, Madrid, 1892.

sketch of the traditional Fonseca that synthesizes all the evil reports we have of him—his haughty bearing, his grasping control of Indian affairs, his perfidious conduct towards Columbus, Las Casas and Cortés, his patronage of all that was evil and his antagonism for all that was good in the exploration and conquest of the New World. Against this picture of Fonseca we must take into account three facts: first, that Fonseca remained at the head of Indian affairs from 1493 until his death, and enjoyed the constant friendship and confidence of Ferdinand and Isabella, and the respect of their successors, Ximénez, Adrian and Charles V; secondly, that occasional references are made by disinterested and trustworthy witnesses, to his high character and merits; and thirdly, that we have no document proving unworthy motives in any of his actions.

Little is known of the early life and training of Fonseca. He came of a distinguished Castilian family, which gave to the Church no fewer than four archbishops and one bishop in the period of America's discovery. His father, Alonso de Fonseca, held the *Senoría* of Coca and Alaejos, an ancestral title that had been in the family for many generations, to which Don Antonio, an older brother of Bishop Juan, succeeded at his father's death in 1505. Don Antonio was Ambassador to the Holy See in 1495,<sup>2</sup> and later held the important post of Comptroller-General of Castile. The family was connected by marriage with some of the most influential nobles of the time, including the families of González de Mendoza, the "Great Cardinal of Spain," and of Henry, Count of Nassau.<sup>3</sup>

Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca must have come early to the attention of Queen Isabella—possibly as a page at Court—for we are informed by Sigüenza<sup>4</sup> that it was she who entrusted his training to the saintly Talavera, her confessor, "in order that in his service he might learn to be a saint;" and Sigüenza adds, in witness to the gratitude of Fonseca: "Although they made him presently Archdeacon of Olmedo, he never wished to leave the service of Talavera, and used to take pride in calling himself his

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<sup>2</sup> BERNÁLDEZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 683-4.

<sup>3</sup> CARVAJAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 549-50.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 319.

servant." And lest the point be lost, it should be noted that Talavera, in spite of his many duties, both of religion and of state, made a specialty of training young men. His first care, when made first Archbishop of Granada in 1492, was to select, for the service of the choir and sanctuary, thirty poor boys, whom he trained and taught in his own house in preparation for Holy Orders. His care for his priests was not less exacting. "He ate with them," says Sigüenza, "and conducted their life as in a monastery."<sup>5</sup> One other detail of the early life of Fonseca is worthy of mention. He was a favorite pupil of Nebrija, the most famous of Spanish humanists,<sup>6</sup> and this leads us to believe that he studied at Salamanca, where Nebrija was teaching at the time, but we have no more positive information about him until his ordination to the subdiaconate.

This event took place in the Cathedral of Barcelona, on Saturday, March 2, 1493, just two days before Columbus sighted land, off Lisbon, on the return from his first voyage. He was ordained under title of Chaplain to the Queen and Canon of the collegiate church of Alfaro, in Tarragona. He was made a deacon shortly afterwards, and five weeks later, on Holy Saturday, April 6, he was ordained to the priesthood in the same cathedral, and made Archdeacon of Seville.<sup>7</sup>

He had already left Barcelona for his new post when Columbus came to that city for his first interview with the Sovereigns after his return. The stay of Columbus at Court was brief. The King and Queen were anxious to organize the exploration of the newly discovered lands as rapidly as possible in order to forestall any action on the part of Portugal, and Columbus was sent off in haste to Seville, with letters to Fonseca, who had been given the duty of fitting out the new expedition. Whether this was the first meeting of the two is not certain, though it hardly seems likely, for Fonseca's patron, Talavera, had long been a friend of Columbus, and Fonseca could easily have met him at the Bishop's house in Avila, or even earlier at Palencia, which apparently was Talavera's first bishopric.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 302.

<sup>6</sup> CARVAJAL, *op. cit.*, p. 559, n.

<sup>7</sup> FITA, S. J., in the *Boletín*, Vol. xx, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> *Boletín*, Vol. lvi, p. 154.

The enterprise on which Columbus was now embarking was a vast one, and both he and Fonseca were given wide powers and privileges in order to secure its success. The first royal orders were issued on May 23,<sup>9</sup> and the two commissioners immediately set to work on their preparations. The fiscal officers of the kingdom intervened at this juncture, however, fearing that complications might arise from the ample power given to Columbus and Fonseca, and obtained by royal order the appointment of Juan de Soria as their representative with the fleet, to audit its accounts.<sup>10</sup> This selection proved unfortunate, as Soria gave Columbus frequent cause for complaint, first by opposing some of the contracts made by Columbus, and later by a manipulation of the force that accompanied the fleet, fraudulently substituting men and horses of his own choice for those approved by Columbus. His action brought several royal remonstrances and finally caused his dismissal from the service. Between Columbus and Fonseca, on the other hand, there seems at this time to have been a better understanding, in spite of the fact that their powers overlapped, and that the point of view of the young Castilian noble must have often differed from that of the old Genoese navigator. There was one conflict noted by the Crown, however. Columbus insisted on having a large personal bodyguard, and Fonseca opposed this as unnecessary because, since among the thousand people already enlisted for the enterprise, all under the orders of Columbus, there were certainly enough to take care of the personal wants of the Admiral. Irving says that Fonseca was tacitly reprovved for this action, but, on the contrary, we have a royal instruction<sup>11</sup> commending Fonseca for his prudence, and assigning ten squires and twenty servants from among those already enlisted, for the service of Columbus, according to the plan of Fonseca. Irving says further that Fonseca was angered by this supposed reprimand, and purposely delayed the departure of the fleet in order to embarrass Columbus. The real cause of the delay was that the equipment of a fleet of seventeen vessels and a thousand people, for a journey of what then seemed uncon-

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<sup>9</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, pp. 65 *sqq.* and 106 *sqq.*; vol. xxxviii, pp. 135-143, 155-160.

<sup>10</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, pp. 184 *sqq.*

scionable length, and for a permanent settlement in an unknown country, was a feat that taxed to the utmost the resources of Andalusia, which was just recovering from the disturbances of the preceding year, when the Moors were finally driven from its borders. There were frequent royal protests against the delay that would send the vessels out in face of the storms of fall and winter, and yet in spite of this, the Sovereigns themselves, on September 5,<sup>12</sup> changed the destination of five of the ships prepared for Columbus, to form a fleet to convey back to Africa Muley Boabdil, the last Moorish King of Granada. Finally, in spite of vexatious delays, the fleet of Columbus got under way, and Fonseca was given a period of rest before the next arrival of news from the Indies.

This respite was brief, however, for on February 2, 1494, Columbus started Antonio de Torres back to Spain with twelve ships, to give a report on the journey and to requisition new supplies for the colony. Torres reached Cádiz in March, and Fonseca immediately reported his arrival to the Sovereigns, who ordered him to send on at once the letters of Columbus. In his desire to establish order in the affairs of the Indies, Fonseca caused some complaint among the members of the armada at this time, by anticipating modern port regulations.<sup>13</sup> Columbus had sent back some gold received from the Indians, and Fonseca allowed no one to land until he had taken charge of it for the Royal Treasury. This action, though distasteful at the time, fixed the precedent for all succeeding importations of gold from the Indies. The ships were promptly discharged, however, and Fonseca stood ready for further orders from the Sovereigns.

On April 7, a royal order was dispatched commanding him to send at once to the Indies four vessels with colonists and explorers, and to supply them with the necessities of life. It was at first the royal intention to send these four ships at once and a fuller armada later, but the Sovereigns delayed for a fuller study of the *Memorandum* sent by de Torres. This delay proved disastrous to the colony, and was the cause of many of the later troubles of Columbus. Many of the provisions had been spoiled by lack of

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<sup>12</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, pp. 16 *sqq.*

<sup>13</sup> BERNÁLDEZ, *op. cit.*, 668.

care, and the *biscocho*, or hard-tack (the staple that had been most difficult to procure in Andalucia the year before), had given out. However, the urgent needs of the colonists were not realized in Spain, and time wore on as preparations were made for a larger fleet. Difficulties next arose as to the ships to be pressed into the royal service, and this matter was no sooner settled than the scarcity of wheat in Andalucia caused a royal embargo to be placed on its exportation.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Count Cinfuentes, the royal governor of Seville, understood this embargo to include the relief armada, and with winter approaching it seemed that the fleet would never get under way. Another conflicting order<sup>15</sup> came to Fonseca at this time (September 5, 1494), commanding that eight vessels should be sent at once instead of four, and that five more caravels should follow later. Three days later this order was rescinded and Fonseca ordered to send off the original four ships, since more could not be financed until the fall catch of *atún* was sold.<sup>16</sup> The desires of the Sovereigns were beyond their means, and the whole month of September was spent in correspondence about the size of the fleet. It was finally decided to send only four ships, and with a peremptory order to Cinfuentes to suspend the embargo on wheat, the fleet was released and sent on its way about the middle of October.

Little more than a month elapsed before word reached Spain of the extreme distress of the little colony in Española [Hayti]. On December 13, the Sovereigns wrote to Fonseca, acknowledging his report on having heard from Columbus, and ordering him to send another armada back at once. This tentative order was held in abeyance, however, pending the arrival at Court of Margarita and Father Boil, who had come to complain about the administration of Columbus. Fonseca, too, was called away from his duties at this time to be consecrated Bishop, an office bestowed in recognition of his signal service to the Crown. The "Great Cardinal of Spain," Mendoza, had just died, and his bishopric of Sigüenza, the richest in Spain, was given to Carvajal, who later attained unpleasant fame as the leader of the schis-

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<sup>14</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, p. 390.

<sup>15</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, p. 286.

<sup>16</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, p. 398.

matical Cardinals of the Council of Pisa (1511), while Fonseca was nominated for the bishopric of Badajoz, vacated by Carvajal. During his absence, Fonseca left affairs in the hands of Jimeno de Bribiesca, who was later to be distinguished by receiving a personal chastisement from Columbus, when the latter was about to sail on his third voyage. Bribiesca busied himself with preparations while the Court was discussing the case of Columbus, and succeeded in settling with Cinfuentes the vexed question of the bread supply for the colony in Española.<sup>17</sup>

Fonseca soon returned to Seville and resumed charge of affairs. The Court, influenced by the unfavorable report of Margarita and Boil on the Columbus administration, now resolved to send Diego de Carillo with power to investigate the adverse charges, and Fonseca was ordered to place the four vessels under Carillo's command. Another possibility was provided for: the royal order stated that in case Columbus had died, Carillo should take his place.<sup>18</sup> These proceedings were interrupted abruptly, however, by the arrival, in April, of Antonio de Torres with news from Columbus; and Aguado, who had shown himself friendly to Columbus, was now substituted for Carillo in charge of the fleet.<sup>19</sup> Although the Sovereigns ordered Fonseca to send off the fleet at once in spite of the change in command, he held it pending the arrival of Torres at Court, and once the report of Torres was made, so many complications ensued that the ships did not finally sail before June.

It is interesting to note here that Torres brought back with him on this ship the first consignment of Indians to be sold as slaves in Spain.<sup>20</sup> On April 12, 1495, Fonseca was ordered to sell these Indians in Andalucia,<sup>21</sup> and on the following day another dispatch was issued telling him to hold the money received from the sale until theologians could satisfy the royal conscience regarding the morality of this act.<sup>22</sup> This is interesting in view of the large slave-holdings later enjoyed by Fonseca.

<sup>17</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, pp. 327-29.

<sup>18</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, p. 329.

<sup>19</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, p. 349; vol. xxxviii, p. 334.

<sup>20</sup> Those brought on the first voyage were intended for "purposes of demonstration."

<sup>21</sup> NAVARRETE, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 189; *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, p. 332.

<sup>22</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, p. 335; vol. xxxviii, p. 342.



It is at this time, too, that we find the first indication of any conflict between Columbus and Fonseca. Columbus had suggested, it is true, in the de Torres *Memorandum* of the year previous, that perhaps he should "complain of someone higher up," in the matter of defective supplies, but no open or definite complaint seems to have been made to the Crown until Diego Columbus, the younger brother of Christopher, found occasion to object to the fiscal regulations of Fonseca, when he returned with de Torres from the New World. Diego had brought with him some gold, and Fonseca claimed it for the Crown, according to the regulations of the preceding year. Diego objected to this and carried the matter to Court, where he made the most of his opportunity to state his case against Fonseca. This drew forth a royal command for Fonseca to return to Diego the gold he had taken, to "speak to him and try to satisfy him," and to write to Columbus and try to overcome his resentment by finding out what he could do to please him.<sup>23</sup>

The letters containing these commands are most interesting in the light of contemporary and subsequent events. With the representations that had been made, the Sovereigns had ample reason to be vexed at the conduct of Columbus, yet they were always careful not to wound his feelings. On the first of June, they addressed him several personal letters, mildly remonstrating against his severe measures, forbidding him to take away the rations of the colonists as a punishment,<sup>24</sup> and ordering him to return to Spain any colonists who were dissatisfied with their lot. This conciliatory attitude towards Columbus on the part of the Sovereigns was characteristic of their dealings with him, and that it was imitated by Fonseca is clear from later events.

After the departure of Aguado and his fleet in June, 1495, nothing more was heard from the Indies for a year, when Aguado brought Columbus back to Spain for a trial of the charges against him. That Columbus considered Fonseca as an enemy at this time is quite untenable, for we find the two of them sojourning quite happily under the roof of their mutual friend, Padre

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<sup>23</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxx, pp. 350-355; NAVARRETE, *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Las Casas says that Oviedo is in error when he says that Columbus deprived Father Boil and others of rations. *Hist.*, t. ii, p. 118.

Bernáldez, the gossipy *Cura de los Palacios*.<sup>25</sup> And that Columbus was not sent back to America immediately is not to be attributed to any intrigue of Fonseca,<sup>26</sup> nor is there any necessity for supposing a plot in Spain for the overthrow of the Admiral. The reports from Española had convinced the Sovereigns that Columbus was not in sympathy with the Spanish temperament, and they thought it best for his own interests, as well as for the colony in Española, that he have no part in the administration there.

When permission was finally given, the following year (1497) for Columbus to make a third voyage of exploration, Fonseca did everything in his power to expedite matters for him. It is in connection with these preparations that Ferdinand, the son and historian of Columbus, and a decided enemy of Fonseca, makes his only specific charge against him. He says that out of enmity to Columbus, Fonseca purposely delayed the preparations for this voyage. This charge has been repeated by most historians, although, strangely enough, Las Casas, who usually takes every opportunity to condemn Fonseca, attributes the delay to others "who hindered Columbus and Fonseca."<sup>27</sup> And this is shown by documents to have been the real cause for the delay. First, there was the usual lack of money, as we see by two royal orders, dated October 9, 1497, to certain merchants, to pay Columbus and Fonseca for the wheat bought from them, as they need the money for fitting out the armada;<sup>28</sup> and secondly, there was more than the usual trouble about provisions. A royal letter of December 23,<sup>29</sup> acknowledges that both Columbus and Fonseca have reported that the cause of the delay was the unreasonable attitude of the merchants of Andalucía in charging exorbitant prices for everything, and also gives them authority to select agents and to fix reasonable prices. This decisive action of the Crown finally overcame the obstacles in the way of Columbus, and some three weeks later he sailed on his third voyage. That

<sup>25</sup> BERNÁLDEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 678.

<sup>26</sup> BERNÁLDEZ, *loc. cit.*, says that Columbus was detained in Spain by "the necessities of the French War."

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, pp. 394, 396.

<sup>29</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxvi, p. 182.

the delay had irritated Columbus there can be no doubt. On the eve of his departure, according to Las Casas, he gave Bribiesca a place in history by throwing him to the ground and kicking him. That this action was resented by Fonseca may naturally be supposed, and we would have reason to suspect a like resentment on the part of the Sovereigns, a measure of whose authority Bribiesca represented, but we cannot find that any future action of theirs gave evidence of such resentment.

Shortly after the departure of Columbus, preparations were made for other voyages of exploration, and that same year (1498) Niño, Guerra and Ojeda started for the New World. Columbus looked upon such expeditions as an infringement of his rights, and Las Casas makes a special case against Fonseca in the matter of Ojeda's commission. This, he says, was signed by Fonseca alone, whether on his own initiative or under authority from the Crown he did not know, but to his mind it was a plot of Fonseca's to ruin Columbus.<sup>30</sup> Herrera<sup>31</sup> was, likewise, puzzled at finding Ojeda's commission signed by Fonseca, and historians since their time have followed Las Casas in considering this an act of treachery. Fernández Duro has pointed out<sup>32</sup> that there can be no question here of either treachery or unjustified assumption of power by Fonseca, for such an action could not have taken place without the knowledge of the Sovereigns, who must have authorized it. As a matter of fact, the Crown, without wishing to detract from either the glory or the gratitude due to Columbus, had ceased to regard the exploration of the Indies as a "one-man affair." Spain was in urgent need of money and it was expedient—as they stated to Columbus with every message urging haste—that the new country should be explored and its possession established as soon as possible, to forestall any action on the part of their powerful rivals. They did not want to violate any right of Columbus, but if there was any injury it was on the part of the Sovereigns and not of Fonseca. Two years later, when Ojeda applied for a second commission, they granted it with pleasure,<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Hist.*, t. ii, pp. 389–90.

<sup>31</sup> Dec. i, lib. iv, cap. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Amigos y Enemigos de Colón*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, pp. 468 *sqq.*

and gave no intimation that the first expedition had been without their approval. From this time on, in fact, commissions to explore were freely given to all who could offer the proper guarantees, with the restriction that they were not to conflict with commissions previously granted. And that there was nothing irregular in the signature of Fonseca to the commission of Ojeda seems plain from the fact that the several commissions we have, dating from 1500, follow the same plan.<sup>34</sup>

The strange statement is made by historians, on the authority of Las Casas, that Fonseca was deprived of his office for a time during the years 1497-98. There are documents enough to show his activity during this period, but if there were not, the statement of these historians would refute their own charges concerning the delay in the third voyage and the commission of Ojeda. As a matter of fact, Fonseca was constantly rising in the royal favor. In 1499 he was nominated to the vacant bishopric of Córdoba, and in September of that year he was sent as Ambassador to Flanders to arrange for the marriage of the Princess Margarita, widow of the late heir-apparent, Don Juan, to the Duke of Savoy. It is possible that Las Casas may have heard of this or some other absence of Fonseca, and concluded that he was dismissed from the royal service.

The affairs of the Indies ran along smoothly for an extended period now, so far as Fonseca was concerned. The *Casa de Contratación* had developed under his direction so that he was now freed from much of the merely routine work. There were many commissions to make out, fleets to inspect, Indians to be distributed, sold, or sent back to America, as the royal favor turned for or against their slavery, but there seems to have been no serious interruption of the routine until Columbus returned in chains from his third voyage (1501). Even in the sending of Bobadilla to Española to investigate the charges against Columbus, Fonseca seems to have had no more than a perfunctory part.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, pp. 441, 449, 451, 453. Cf. also *ibid.*, Vol. xxxviii, p. 459—a memorandum of letters sent Columbus, in which he is informed that no one is to go to the Indies without the permission of the Sovereigns or the person authorized in Cádiz.

<sup>35</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxviii, pp. 409-431.

The arrival of Columbus in chains caused quite a sensation in Seville and at the Court. Columbus came with many complaints, and not the least of them, apparently, was the matter of Ojeda's commission. The Queen was full of sympathy and did not want to see him wronged, but neither did she want him to hold any resentment against her royal chaplain, Fonseca; so she offered, Columbus says in a letter,<sup>36</sup> to act as intermediary for their differences. Whether this resentment was anything more serious than a suspicion that Fonseca had favored Ojeda at his expense we do not know, but it is certain that the two were on agreeable terms a few years later, when Columbus wrote (January 18, 1505) to his son Diego: "If the Bishop of Palencia is arrived, or when he does come, tell him how much I rejoice in his prosperity, and that if I go there [to Segovia] I will stop with him at his house whether he wishes it or not, for we ought to return to our first brotherly affection." "This," says Thacher, whose translation is quoted, "is the language of pleasantries to an old friend, not such a message as would be sent to a bitter enemy who for thirteen years had persecuted him and thwarted or delayed most of his plans."<sup>37</sup> This is the last documentary reference we have to the relations between Columbus and Fonseca, and it can hardly justify us in picturing the latter as hounded to his grave by a cold-blooded and unforgiving enemy.

We have just seen Fonseca referred to as Bishop of Palencia. This dignity came to him on the death, late in 1504, of Cardinal Zúñiga, Archbishop of Seville. Diego de Deza, an old friend of Columbus, went from Palencia to take the place of Zúñiga, and Fonseca was advanced to the latter see. He was in Flanders at the time, on a message from Ferdinand to his daughter Juana, who had been associated with him in the government since the death of Isabella (November 26, 1504). Shortly after this he

<sup>36</sup> *May 24, 1501.* THACHER, *Columbus*, Vol. iii, pp. 159-163.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 550. This message is preceded in the *Book of Privileges* by several other letters to Diego referring to the "Bishop of Palencia." Thacher refers them all to Fonseca, but the first, dated November 21, in which Columbus says "the Lord Bishop of Palencia wishes to honor me," is said by Sánchez Moguel to refer neither to Deza, the retiring Bishop, nor to the new incumbent, Fonseca, but to Talavera, who was Bishop of Palencia when the project of Columbus was first examined by the scholars of the realm, before the first voyage. See his article in the *Boletín de la Real Academia de Historia*, Vol. lvi, p. 154.

was called home to perform the last rites for his father, who was laid to rest in the ancestral tomb at Coca.

Historians who follow Herrera and Las Casas bring next before us a supposed conflict between Fonseca and Diego, the son and heir of Columbus. Diego went to Española as governor on the recall of Ovando, in 1509, and was in command there, at intervals, for some fourteen years. He made frequent trips to Spain, to answer the charges made against his administration and to secure his claims to hereditary rights which had been infringed by various royal appointments. That Fonseca was concerned in the charges against him is shown by a letter<sup>38</sup> to him from the Duke of Alba, whose niece Diego had married, in which the Bishop is charged with opposing the suit of Diego. However, that this opposition was anything more than an official act of prosecution seems unlikely, for Duro says, on the authority of Garibay, that when Diego and the Duke of Alba could obtain nothing, pending the settlement of the suit, Fonseca and the secretary of his Council, Conchillos, obtained for Diego the government of the Indies.<sup>39</sup> Diego was naturally jealous of the privileges which he saw slipping away from him with the growth of the enterprise of the Indies; every new appointment called forth a protest from him, so that we even find him aligned against both the friends and enemies of Fonseca in the famous case of Cortés against Velásquez for the government of Mexico, in an appeal to the Emperor to dismiss the claims of both, as in conflict with his own.<sup>40</sup> Fonseca, on the other hand, stood for a progressive development of the colonies under properly established authority, and it was natural that his plans should often be in conflict with the ambitions of Diego.

Fonseca meanwhile had risen to the zenith of his power. His work was well organized at Seville, and he was frequently called upon by Ferdinand, to whose royal chapel he had been attached,

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<sup>38</sup> Published in 1892 by the DUQUESA DE BERWICK Y ALBA: *Autógrafos de Colón y Papeles de América*. Cf. *Boletín*, Vol. xxv, p. 405.

<sup>39</sup> DURO, *op. cit.*, p. 19. The commission of Diego, with the signatures of Ferdinand and Fonseca is given in NAVARRETE, Vol. ii, p. 406.

<sup>40</sup> *Boletín*, Vol. xxv, p. 409. Cortés told the Emperor in the Garay case that he knew that Garay was supported by Diego Columbus, Fonseca and Velásquez. *Cartas de Cortés*, p. 103.

for business of state not concerned with America. Thus we find him, in May, 1511, royal commissioner in the affairs of the English army hired by Ferdinand for the suppression of the schism of Carvajal and the taking of Bologna.<sup>41</sup> In 1512 he was advanced from Palencia to the see of Burgos, and probably in that same year he was made Archbishop of Rosano, when Cardinal Carvajal was excommunicated and deprived of his benefices. Finally, on July 26, 1513, King Ferdinand asked for his appointment as Patriarch of the Indies. In his letter to Gerónimo de Vich, Ambassador to the Holy See, the king refers to him as "of illustrious birth, one of the principal nobles of this kingdom, who has from the beginning been encharged with the affairs of the Indies, and has by his disinterested industry and vigilance, diligence and care, . . . been the very principal cause of much good accomplished there, and continues his labors with great zeal to the end that all those peoples may be converted to Our Lord."<sup>42</sup> In spite of the instances of Ferdinand, however, Pope Leo X did not consider it advisable to create in the West a great ecclesiastical power like the Eastern centralizations that had caused so much damage to the Church, and the matter was held in reserve.<sup>43</sup> With Fonseca's rise in power came a corresponding increase in influence and wealth. As President of the *Consejo de Indias* and head of the *Casa de Contratación*, he received many royal grants of lands and Indians, and he is mentioned as one of the largest holders of Indian slaves under the system of *repartimientos*. The question of the justice of this system had been agitated time and again during these first years by friars and governors, and it had been provisionally adopted as the best working plan for civilizing the Indians and bringing them to Christianity. This was the state of affairs when Las Casas, who had but recently changed his views and given up his slaves, appeared in Spain with proposals of relief for the Indians. News of his views and radical utterances had reached Spain ahead of him, for the authorities in Española, fearing the destruc-

<sup>41</sup> BERNÁLDEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 744.

<sup>42</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxix, p. 264. NAVARRETE, Vol. ii, p. 390.

<sup>43</sup> The Patriarchate was not established until 1524, under Clement VII, when Don Antonio de Rojas, Archbishop of Granada, was given the honorary title of Patriarch of the Indies. Cf. *Boletín*, Vol. vii, p. 197.

tion of their sources of revenue, were anxious to forestall any revolutionary change. In view of this condition, the first representations of Las Casas to Fonseca were not received with any degree of enthusiasm. Angered at his cool reception, Las Casas made use of the division of powers and sympathies that came with the death of Ferdinand and the accession of Charles V (1516). He obtained the approval of Ximénez, the regent, for his first plan for an investigation and for his later projects for the introduction of Castilian and negro laborers, and for his peaceful conquest of Cumaná with the "Knights of the Golden Spur." For these later projects he also enlisted the aid of the Flemish advisers whom the new Emperor, Charles V, had introduced into Spanish affairs, and with the support of these powers he felt free from any dependence on Fonseca—so free, in fact, that he even disregarded the approval of Fonseca's Council given to his second scheme, and went directly to Ximénez and the *Flamencos*. Naturally, such action did not tend to heal the breach between the two. Many sharp repartees passed between them, and, knowing as we do the tendency of Las Casas to judge everything by its relation to the object of his zealous prepossession, we can see how his own view of Fonseca has colored his narrative of the latter's dealings with Columbus. No doubt both were honest in their views, but Fonseca saw in the plans of Las Casas the subversion of the order he had built up on what he considered the best advices received from the New World, and he was not prepared to sacrifice his personal interests and those of his countrymen for what he considered the idealizations of an obsession. Towards the end, their relations grew more friendly, however, as the plans of Las Casas matured and appeared more feasible; but there never was a perfect understanding between the two, and it is to this disagreement, more than anything else, that we can trace Fonseca's bad name in history.

But if Fonseca's dealings with Las Casas were unfortunate, his relations with Cortés were tragic, and brought no little trouble to the closing years of his life. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the camp-fire Boswell of Cortés, gives at great length the story of the conflict between the Conquistador of Mexico and the Bishop of Burgos, and roundly accuses the latter of using all his



influence for the destruction of the enterprise; and yet he begins his story with the frank admission that it was all the result of a misunderstanding.<sup>44</sup>

The story of the conquest of Mexico has been popularized by Prescott, but a few of its salient features need to be set forth briefly to explain the opposition of Fonseca to it. After the first discovery and reconnaissance of Mexico by the expeditions of Hernández de Córdoba and Grijalva, Diego de Velásquez, governor of Cuba, determined to send a larger expedition to explore this promising country. He enlisted Cortés in the expedition, and placed him in command of the eleven ships that were prepared. However, before the fleet sailed, he grew suspicious of the daring young Castilian and sent to remove him from command, but Cortés anticipated his action by sailing away at once. Velásquez immediately denounced his action to the *Casa de Contratación* as insubordination, and won his point by gaining the good will of Fonseca before Cortés had an opportunity to explain his action. Cortés knew of the friendly relations that existed between Fonseca and Velásquez, and he determined to offset this by making a good impression on the Emperor,<sup>45</sup> and thus obtain recognition directly from him. To this end he pushed his conquest as rapidly as possible, and sent commissioners to Spain with large presents of gold, and letters to the Emperor asking for a royal commission to rule the land he had occupied. Unfortunately for him, the Emperor was in Flanders when his first commission arrived, and the delegates were met by Fonseca. In his official capacity he took charge of the letters and gold for the Emperor, and if he had had reasons of state before for being opposed to Cortés, he now had very personal reasons to be much more so, for among the messages was one from the troops of Cortés, which denounced Fonseca to the Emperor in severe terms and stated that the reason for his opposition was that Velásquez had given him "a town of Indians in Cuba, while he had given no Indians to the Emperor."<sup>46</sup> Fonseca had every reason to suspect what we know to have been the case, namely,

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<sup>44</sup> "Supimos por muy cierto que nos andaba por destruir, y todo por ser mal informado." *Conquista de Nueva España*, ch. 43.

<sup>45</sup> DIAZ, *op. cit.*, ch. 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Op. cit.*, ch. 54.

that Cortés spread this idea among his troops and approved their letter. Cortés said later in a letter<sup>47</sup> to the Emperor that in order to maintain loyalty among his troops he had told them to disregard the threats of Fonseca, who was moved by personal interests, and Bernal Diaz says that Cortés read the letter of the soldiers to the Emperor and was pleased with it.<sup>48</sup>

Fonseca's action was prompt and decisive. He conferred with the agent of Velásquez, Padre Benito Martínez, who happened to be at Court at the time, and was informed that the representations of Cortés were false. He then arrested one of the commissioners, Puertocarrero, who was charged with abducting a girl and taking her to the Indies two years before, and sent to the Emperor a report favorable to Velásquez and opposed to Cortés. Meanwhile Velásquez had incurred the wrath of the Royal Audiencia at Santo Domingo, by contemning their authority. Against their veto he sent Narvaez with an expedition of seventeen ships against Cortés. Narvaez was outwitted by Cortés and disarmed. The same thing happened to the two officials, Tapia and Bono de Quexo, sent later under authority of Fonseca, and when Cortés learned that he had gained the Audiencia through the foolhardiness of Velásquez, he pushed his case before the Emperor. He sent commissioners with magnificent presents on two succeeding occasions, and when these delegates met with the opposition to Fonseca, they went over his head and brought suit before Adrian of Utrecht, who, though recently elected Pope, was still residing in Spain as Regent. Adrian heard the arguments of both sides and decided against Fonseca, who was thenceforth to have no jurisdiction in the matters of Cortés. The charge was made, and apparently proved, that Fonseca had an additional personal reason for favoring Velásquez, in that he was trying to arrange a marriage between that official and a niece of his own, Doña Petronila de Fonseca; but the claim that Fonseca had kept for himself the gold sent to Charles does not seem to have been established, for neither the decision of Adrian nor the later judgment of Charles had any clause demanding restitution.

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<sup>47</sup> *Cartas de Cortés*, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> *Op. cit.*, ch. 54.

Charles V returned from Flanders shortly afterwards, and approved the sentence of Adrian. Bernal Diaz says that Fonseca, "in rage and mortification," retired to his estates at Toro. Here he was sought out by a number of the enemies of Cortés, who had gathered in Spain to make common cause against him. There was Narvaez, whose ambition Cortés had disarmed; Umbria, whose feet had been cut off by command of Cortés for insubordination;<sup>49</sup> and Cárdenas, whose grievance was that the action of Cortés in sending as much gold as possible to the Emperor left the soldiers with insufficient reward for their hardships and labors in the conquest.<sup>50</sup> Fonseca headed this delegation to the Emperor, and presented a long series of charges, in which it was maintained that the expedition of Cortés, which began with an act of insubordination, had been marked by a series of depredations in contempt of all authority. Charles ordered another investigation and named, as commissioners of the trial, the Italian Grand Chancellor, with three Castilian and two Flemish judges. The result of the trial, as far as Fonseca was concerned, was the same as before: the wrongs of Cárdenas and Umbria were redressed, the case of Narvaez was reserved, Velásquez was reprimanded for having treated with Fonseca alone instead of with the Emperor, and the withdrawal of Cortés from the jurisdiction of Fonseca was confirmed.

Still another attempt was made by Fonseca to attain what he considered his rights against Cortés. Rodrigo de Albornoz came to Fonseca with a new set of charges against Cortés, and was recommended to the Emperor by the Bishop. That Charles had not lost faith in Fonseca's judgment is shown by his statement on this occasion: "I will have to punish Cortés for all the evil they tell of him, in spite of all the gold he sends, for justice is worth more than all the treasure he can command."<sup>51</sup> There was a long delay, however, before the investigation was begun in Mexico, and the Bishop of Burgos went to his grave without the satisfaction of proving his case against the Conquistador of Mexico.

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 102.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 105.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 172.

Fonseca had been ailing for some time before, and no doubt his irritation at the charges made against him by Las Casas and Cortés was partly influenced by his physical condition. We have one letter from him in which he begs to be excused from coming to Court, because of a sudden attack which affected his stomach and lungs. It is dated from Burgos, August 11, 1517, and begins with the naïve acknowledgment: "Your Majesty's letter was handed to me yesterday, Monday, the feast of St. Lawrence, while I was at Mass. . . ." <sup>52</sup> The state of his health and the uncomfortable times he had been through made him less active in Indian affairs, though it is not true, as Bernal Diaz and others assert, that he was deprived of his office by Charles V. In fact we have an official letter <sup>53</sup> from him to the Emperor, dated November 12, 1523, the day before the date assigned by Fernández Duro for his death. <sup>54</sup> It reports that the officials at Seville have advised him of the arrival of Don Diego Columbus at San Lucar de Barrameda, and that Fray Pedro Melgarejo has brought gold that was not registered; and this proves conclusively that he was quite active up to the last. <sup>55</sup> There has been considerable discussion as to the time of his death, <sup>56</sup> but it is certain that he died within a little more than a year after the second decision against him, signed by Charles, October 22, 1522. <sup>57</sup>

For a full judgment of the merits and failings of Fonseca,

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<sup>52</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xxxvi, p. 527.

<sup>53</sup> *Doc. inéd.*, Vol. xl, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> *Boletín*, Vol. vii, p. 203.

<sup>55</sup> Diaz and Gomara seem equally unjustified in saying that Fonseca had a serious quarrel with his nephew (cousin?), Alonso de Fonseca, over the succession to the Archbishopric of Santiago, which they say the latter had obtained by furnishing money for the recovery from France of Fuente Rabia, in Navarre. Alonso received this benefice in trust, in 1507, on the resignation of his predecessor, who died five years later; but he never occupied the see, for when he came of age to receive it the see of Toledo was made vacant by the sudden death of Croy, the immediate successor of Ximénez, and Alonso took that see by preference. Tavera was made Archbishop of Santiago. CARVAJAL, *op. cit.*, pp. 556 *sqq.* Cf. also GARIBAY, *Los Cuarenta libros del Compendio historial de las Chronicas y universal Historia de todos los Reynos de España*. Barcelona, 1628, lib. xx.

<sup>56</sup> Irving places it as late as 1554, and this, in view of another conjecture as to the date of his birth, 1451, would have made him 103 years of age at his death—a noble age for a choleric man!

<sup>57</sup> SOLÍS, *Conq. de Méjico*, p. 356. Bernal Diaz says May 17.

we must await a fuller search by Spanish scholars into the more personal records of his life, but that he has been grossly misjudged by historians there can be no doubt. He was a wise, constructive statesman, and bore the brunt of Spanish colonial organization. He stood between the extravagant dreams of both Sovereigns and discoverers, and the limited means of the Spanish treasury, that had to wait for the sale of the fall catch of *atún* to equip a fleet. This constant need of money made him favor expeditions that promised large returns, to the apparent injury of the monopolistic rights granted to Columbus and his son. The project of Las Casas seemed to him economically inexpedient, and in the case of Cortés he allowed himself to be carried away by the representations of Velásquez that Cortés was a rebel. That "he was more given to equipping fleets than to saying Pontifical Masses," as Las Casas sharply said of him, need not surprise us. Those were the days of Court Bishops, when holy men like Talavera and Ximénez considered that they could advance God's interests by giving good advice to kings as well as by remaining at home with their flocks; and it must be said of Fonseca that he saw more of the water-front in Cádiz than of the luxury of Court. He was a Castilian of the Castilians, proud without a doubt, resentful, too, like the rest of his race, of the ascendancy of Flemish advisers in the Court of Charles, and his practical autonomy during the last years of Ferdinand probably made him exceed his powers later; but that he was a vindictive and unforgiving enemy, or that he stooped to vile and underhand means to accomplish his end, there is not a shred of a document to prove.

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